



Combines harvesting wheat south of Moosomin.

## Local farmers pleased with harvest

BY KARA KINNA

As of last week, harvest was nearly wrapped up in the Moosomin area, with local farmers saying they are pleased with the yields and the quality of crop that has come off this fall.

"I think it was a pretty good harvest for everybody," says Tim Crossley, who grows crops around Moosomin, and planted spring wheat and canola this year.

"They came off in good condition. I think the wheat's all number two and the canola is all number one.

"They were very good yields. They were probably around 8-10 bushels better than what I was expecting on both the wheat and the canola.

"We were concerned about the wind at times on the canola swaths, but other than that it was pretty good. The field conditions were excellent as far as wetness. It was actually a very good harvest, it wasn't that challenging. We didn't have a lot of mechanical problems and the field conditions were very good. We got the grain off mostly dry."

Crossley finished harvesting on Saturday, Sept. 17 and says his harvest took around five weeks.

He says he is particularly pleased with

his canola crop.

"I'd say the canola was probably the best we'd ever had. And the wheat was maybe not quite as good as 2013 but pretty close," he says.

John Van Eaton planted barley, peas, wheat and canola in the Maryfield area, which got lots of moisture this summer. Van Eaton says the crops have been coming off in good quality, but the peas were a challenge to harvest. Van Eaton was around 80 per cent finished his harvest last week.

"So far we are happy with the quality," he says.

"Peas, like a lot of pulse crops this year, we had some that were pretty disappointing and some that were pretty reasonable. The main factor was how much rain those fields got or didn't get. The moisture and harvestability were just unbelievable.

"I think we've been growing peas for about 27 years and I don't remember having this much trouble. Just because of the excessive wet conditions through the summer, they just wouldn't feed into the combine. We had an extremely difficult time harvesting them.

"Other than that one crop it's been going pretty good. I wouldn't say that disease is any more prevalent than any other year al-

though we did a lot of spraying with fungicide, so maybe that helps.

"We certainly have lost some acres to drowned out areas. It might be as high as 10 or 15 per cent.

"I would say, outside of challenges with peas, this season has gone reasonable well." Jeff Skulmoski grew canola, barley and lentils in the Fairlight area. Like Van Eaton, he says his harvest went well, except for the peas.

"It's been going pretty smoothly. We're pretty much done, we just have some lentils to combine and then we are done for the year," says Skulmoski.

"The canola, we were happy with the yields, barley we were happy with the yield—everything this year has been pretty positive. We've had really good luck. We've had a good year and everything has been running smoothly.

"We've had some challenges with the pulse crops but overall everything else is good. The harvesting of the pulse crops has been a real nightmare.

"I only had 400 acres of peas and I don't know how long it actually took me because we just picked away at it and got sick of it and went and harvested other crops, and then when we had spare time we'd go back

to it. I don't know how many hours we put into harvesting them but it wasn't fun. We probably could have harvested four times or five times more canola in the time it took me to do the peas.

"The pea crop was lodged, it was just hard to cut and hard to get into the combine. Of course when it's lodged you're fighting with little rocks through the machine and that always causes issues. These machines aren't made to put rocks through. We never had any major damage to stop it but there were lots of little repairs. There will be a bigger repair bill on the combine this year because of the pulse crops, I already know that."

Despite the challenges, Skulmoski says the peas came off in good quality.

"The peas were good, the lentils are definitely not top quality, I don't know what they will grade yet. As far as the peas go they were all good quality."

Skulmoski says he considers this year a better than average one.

"That year when it was really wet, about two years ago, I still have that in mind, so this year was a real breeze. Harvest was simple this year. It was a better than average year, that's for sure."

*Continued on page C11*

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# New fertilizer blending facility: Sharpe's planning major investment in Moosomin

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Sharpe's Soil Services is planning a \$2.8 million investment in its Moosomin location.

The company plans a new fertilizer blending facility that will allow for faster and more efficient blending of fertilizer.

"It has been in the works for three years now," said Chris Davidson, general manager of Sharpe's in Moosomin. "We've been putting a plan together for the new facilities. The blend system that's in there now has been in there since 1995."

Davidson said the fertilizer industry has changed greatly over the years. "In 1978, when we built that place it was state of the art," he said. "Most guys were still using bag fertilizers, using 50 pound bags. In the late '70s growers started moving to bulk fertilizer, increasing rates and adding a lot more yield."

Davidson said the investment will lead to faster blending.

"We've been limited in the number of products that we can blend, and the speed of blending is a limiting factor right now," he said.

"This new system is going to greatly increase the blending speed. We will be able to load regular semis, a truck and trailer, in about five minutes where now it takes us about 20 minutes. Speed and accuracy is the key thing. The new system will blend at a rate of 300 metric tonnes per hour and the old one did about 60 tonnes per hour. It will be a great increase in speed we can blend."

"Besides improving the speed of blending, we will be adding more flexibility to be able to pick and choose different products



The new fertilizer blending facility at Sharpe's Soil Services in Moosomin will look similar to this but will be larger, with eight tanks on each side, not six.

depending on what the market-place demands. There are always new products coming. To have the ability to quickly adapt and bring another product into the system is key. With the old system we only had the ability to blend five different products. The new system will allow us to blend eight or more products plus will be able to introduce either dry or liquid micro nutrients into the system. There are certain additives that you put on fertilizer to enhance its performance

and we will be able to add those products into the system as well, so it will give us much greater flexibility in what products we can introduce."

Davidson said the fertilizer industry has grown a lot over the years and has helped farmers increase production. "Blair Sharpe started the business in 1976," he says. "Back then there was a lot of summerfallow, so you would only harvest a crop every second year. For instance with wheat they would probably average 35

bushels that second year. Now, with better fertilizer application, they're fairly consistently getting 60 bushels of spring wheat every year.

"You've seen big increases in canola, too. Back in the '70s they were open pollinated varieties and now pretty much 100 percent of canola that is grown is a hybrid. It yields way better and of course they bring out new varieties all the time, so our canola yields have gone from 25 bushels back then to this year many of our

guys are up around 50 bushels or so. It's the same kind of scenario with the other crops. The volume of nutrients that are going into the ground now has increased dramatically, and yields have increased along with it."

Davidson said Sharpe's Soil Services has grown greatly over the years.

"Blair Sharpe started in '76 with one store in Moosomin and we have six stores now in the south east corner of the province. We had three or four people working back in the eighties and now we've got six stores with around 25 full-time people and we hire another 12 to 14 summer students or seasonal help. It has grown immensely. We built it all on service. We have always been a service orientated company. We provide agronomics, soil testing, delivery. The way we built things was on service—customer service and building relationships."

Davidson says he sees potential for the business to grow further.

"Producers need service, they need products, they need advice. They need information and I don't think that is going to change. They need service and that is what we provide."

He said the business serves a large area.

"We go north and west right up to Yorkton from our Lagenburg and Stockholm branches and South to Redvers. To the east we have lots of customers in the Elkhorn area and Kirkella. Going over west we have customers in Whitewood or so, so its a pretty big area."

Construction will start soon on the new blending facility.

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Six-year-old Remington Banga of Stockholm Sask. walks her dad Blair's heavy horse pulling team back to the horse trailer at Jack Grad's annual Old-time Threshing Bee at Stockholm.

Christalée Froese photo

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# How drones will be used for plant breeding

By NEIL BILLINGER  
A new global resource for plant breeders could greatly reduce the length of time it takes to develop new crop varieties. The Plant Phenotyping and Imaging Research Centre (P2IRC) will be based at the University of Saskatchewan. Money is being spent on brain power—not on bricks and mortar. A multi-disciplinary approach will see plant breeders collaborate with biologists, chemists, robotic engineers and other

scientists. The effort is being coordinated by the Global Institute for Food Security at the University of Saskatchewan. GIFS Executive Director Maurice Moloney says eventually plant breeding will become a more computerized activity, similar to aerospace design and engineering. **Breeder's eye** Plant breeders currently go into the field and use a combination of vision, experience and intuition to select the best genetic ma-



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terial in large scale field trials. Moloney calls this the "breeder's eye," which he refers to as an "analog procedure."

"It is not easily searchable or easily put together in databases," Moloney says. "It is hard to build statistics around it. What we are trying to do is turn the breeder's eye into a digital activity."

**Collecting images** Drones equipped with high precision cameras will fly over fields taking hundreds of thousands of photographs over an extended period.

"What you can do is begin to put together measurements of plant growth rates," Moloney says. "You can take into account things like colour and photosyn-

thesis. You can also see the shapes and architecture of plant. All of these are major parameters of interest to the plant breeder."

The Canadian Light Source on the U of S campus, also known as a synchrotron, will play an important role as well. The particle acceleration generates x-rays of a quality that can penetrate plant structures. This allows scientists to examine cell structures in very fine detail and to view roots growing in the soil.

**Partnerships** The new centre involves partnerships with four Canadian universities, three international institutes along with the National Research Council and Agriculture and Agri-Food

Canada. Funding comes from a \$37.2 million award over seven years from the Canada First Research Excellence Fund. P2IRC is currently recruiting graduate students, technicians, software developers and researchers. It currently takes 12 to

15 years to develop a new crop variety. Moloney hopes to reduce that time by more than half during the next decade.

"By 2022, we hope to create a unique global resource for plant breeders to develop new crop varieties at unprecedented speed and scale," Moloney says.

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## New Versatile dealership

# RPM is area's newest implement dealer

BY KARA KINNA

The Moosomin area will soon have a new implement dealer. Rick and Cindy Petersen, with RPM Service, just north of Moosomin on Highway 8, have decided to start selling Versatile tractors.

This is the first foray into sales for the couple, who started RPM Service in 2002—a company that provides repairs, maintenance and equipment for ag and industrial customers, as well as automotive repairs. Back then the company was mobile, doing service calls in people's shops or in the fields. The Petersens set up a shop in Welwyn, then a few years ago, purchased 22 acres of land along Highway 8 north of Moosomin, complete with a large shop for servicing trucks and equipment.

The new location brought new opportunities.

"We've been in service for a while so we thought we'd try sales," says Rick. "It's a good location on the highway."

"We have a lot of room to park equipment," adds Cindy. "Hopefully it increases our business. We're trying to grow."

Cindy says before the move to the new location, the couple talked about what they could sell.

"Ever since we talked about moving to Moosomin, we've talked about what we could maybe



Cindy and Rick Petersen in front of their shop at RPM Service on Highway 8 north of Moosomin. The couple will soon be selling Versatile tractors on their 22 acre lot.

sell," she says. "And Versatile is just one thing. We could get into other short lines, but right now we will start with that and see how it goes."

"We will sell parts as well. It's not just the sales end of it. There will be a

parts department as well," adds Rick.

Why Versatile?

"They are made in Canada and there are no other Versatile dealers real close by," says Rick. "Case and John Deere and New Holland are already here. And

Versatile does have a good reputation for a four wheel drive tractor.

"It's their 50th anniversary, so they've been out for a long time. Their four wheel drives have always been a decent work horse. They've got probably the

largest cab in the industry and they still have reliable horse power. It's a Cummins engine, so that's proven—they've been around forever—and a Caterpillar power shift transmission, so it's proven as well."

Rick says he has had

good customer feedback since he's announced they will be carrying Versatile.

"Anybody that comes in, they are glad to hear that there is another dealer coming to town," he says. "Competition is good' is what they say, and I think Versatile the last few years has come a long way. There are a lot of people who are excited about that brand."

The Petersens are starting small, and will only have a few tractors on their lot to start with. They are expecting their first tractors to arrive late in 2016 or early in 2017. But they say there will be room for growth.

"We are excited and nervous at the same time," says Rick.

"We're going to have to hire. There will probably be room for technicians, partsmen, salesmen eventually."

Cindy says some renovating will need to be done on their building to accommodate a parts department.

The couple say they are both looking forward to having people come take a look at the new equipment once it arrives.

"Once it comes in we will have an open house. People can come in and look at the equipment," says Rick.

"We'd be happy to have people come stop in and check it out," adds Cindy.

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# Nitrates in forage crops—a Q & A session



gen fertilizer increases soil nitrogen and can increase the potential for nitrate accumulation. Immature plants accumulate nitrates more easily as they are still growing rapidly. Alfalfas, vetches, trefoils, peas and clovers generally do not accumulate nitrates.

**What is the best time to cut forages after frost to reduce nitrate risk?**

This largely depends on the severity of the frost. Following a light frost where some plants may have survived, waiting seven to ten days can allow for some nitrates to be metabolized. If plants are killed during a hard frost, the nitrates have no place to go and will remain in the plant tissue. The highest nitrate accumulation typically occurs two to three days following a frost. Thus following a hard frost, it is best to harvest the forage crop within one day of damage.

**Will ensiling or baling the forage help reduce nitrate levels?**

Making silage may or may not reduce nitrate content. Ensiling does not guarantee a reduction of nitrates to safe levels. Nitrate concentrations in baled feed do not change significantly during storage.

**How are nitrates causing toxicity in animals?**

The nitrates themselves are not toxic to livestock. However, in ruminants such as cattle, sheep, goats and bison, the rumen bacteria convert nitrate to nitrite (NO<sub>2</sub>). Nitrite is then converted to ammonia. Nitrate poisoning occurs when the conversion of nitrate to nitrite exceeds the animals' capacity to convert nitrite to ammonia. Nitrite causes toxicity by reducing the capability of blood to carry oxygen which leads to internal suffocation of the animal. Sub-lethal doses may result in loss of appetite, reduced milk production, slow growth, and abortion.

**How can I know if my forage is safe to feed?**

There are no visual indicators for nitrates in feed. The only way to know for certain that feed is safe for consumption is to submit a sample for a feed test. Forage nitrate levels less than 0.5 percent nitrate (reported as NO<sub>3</sub> in dry matter) are considered safe for consumption. Remember that varying levels of nitrates are also present in water sources. When evaluating possible nitrate toxicity, the nitrate in both feed and water must be considered because they are cumulative.

For more information please contact your Regional Forage or Livestock Specialist, call the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377 or visit our website at Saskatchewan.ca/agriculture.

NADIA MORI, MSc, PAg, REGIONAL FORAGE SPECIALIST  
WATROUS REGIONAL SERVICES OFFICE  
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as after a frost, during drought, or following hail damage, the plant is no longer able to process its nitrates and accumulation can occur.

**How come there are nitrates in forage crops?**  
Nitrate (NO<sub>3</sub>) is the form of nitrogen taken up by plant roots. Under normal conditions, nitrates are transported to the plant stems and leaves where they are converted to protein. If normal plant growth is suddenly interrupted, such

**Are all forages susceptible to nitrate accumulation?**  
Annual forage crops like oats and millet generally contain more nitrates compared to perennial forages. Weeds such as kochia, pigweed, and lambsquarter are also more prone to nitrate accumulation. Large applications of nitro-

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Left: Parents Sarah and Brian Sebastian with their three kids and 4-H cows, left to right, Delaney, Emily and Evan.

## Foray into 4-H pays dividends for family

BY CHRISTALEE FROESE

What started out as a fun new activity to try has turned into a pretty serious business for the Sebastian family.

The family of five now dedicates nearly every day to selecting, feeding and training their 4-H cattle. And as for the fun, they say that has only increased, the more involved they have become.

Their trial run in the Fillmore-Francis 4-H Club began in 2008 on a suggestion from fellow farm friends to try it out.

Brian and Sarah Sebastian's oldest son Evan was 10 years old at the time and was eager to join his farm buddies on a new adventure. The mixed farmers had never been involved with 4-H in the past but they thought they'd try it for a year, with five-year-old Emily and three-year-old Delaney in tow.

"That first year we learned how to finish last in everything and if there had been a place below last, we would have been in it," jokes dad Brian, explaining that he had never been in 4-H as a kid and had no idea what was involved with showing cattle.

"It was nerve wracking to watch your kid go into a ring with a 1,200 pound

animal," said Sarah who grew up on an acreage in Pilot Butte, Sask.

The family persevered through their first years in 4-H thanks to mentorship by experienced club leader Levi Jackson and other 4-H parents. By the time Delaney had turned six, she too was showing cattle, as was Emily.

Being part of 4-H is now a passion for all five family members with 17-year-old Evan being senior showmanship champion at the Brandon fair in 2016, 12-year-old Emily winning the junior showmanship division in Brandon in 2016 and nine-year-old Delaney being reserved junior champion at that same event.

The list of awards for the Sebastian kids is long but the highlight for all three of them is working together as a family. The Sebastians are religious about weighing their steers and heifers on the first Saturday of every month, whether that falls on New Year's Day or a holiday or not. And they are also dedicated to sitting down with their 4-H record books on the first Sunday of every month to record the new data and adjust their upcoming month's feed rations.

"It's like a big family vacation when

we go to shows," said Evan, explaining that the family's annual show circuit includes Agribition in Regina, the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair in Brandon, the Yorkton Exhibition, the Weyburn Fair and their 4-H club's achievement day.

As the Sebastians grew more serious about showing cattle, they realized their own herd of commercial beef cows could not compete with club calves. So in 2013 Evan bought his first club calf, launching the family into a breeding program that sees the three kids fighting over sire directories.

"For them getting a new catalogue in the mail is better than the Christmas Wish Book," said Brian, explaining that the kids will sneak the bull profile magazines under their pillows at night and to school to be able to get first dibs on them.

Sarah said when she looks back at how far her three children have come in 4-H, she is thankful they took the step seven years ago to get involved.

"4-H is something that we can do together as a family to be together with the kids and to see their confidence, decision-making skills and responsibil-

ity for their animals grow," said Sarah, who is the self-proclaimed 'family manager,' booking the hotels, sending in the show paperwork and keeping everyone fed and happy while they're on the road from October to July.

Emily said some parts of 4-H can be challenging, like having to spend months and months to halter break a steer or heifer. But overall, the rewards far outweigh the work and dedication required.

"It's something we can do that actually gives us some income because when we sell our cows, we save the money and we use it to buy calves for next year's project or to put away for our education or something big that we want to purchase," said Emily.

Evan's 4-H earnings bought him a truck last year. Emily and Delaney hope they will be in the same position when they are old enough to drive. But for now, they're just enjoying the daily ride of caring for their cattle and traveling to shows with their family.

"You have to be very dedicated to do this because it's a lot of work, but it's also a lot of fun," said Emily.

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# Normalized beef trade between Canada and Mexico

The countdown to a fully normalized beef trade between Canada and Mexico is nearly complete, with less than a week before Mexico fully reopens to Canadian beef on October 1.

The Canadian Cattle-men's Association (CCA) is pleased that a team of Mexican officials visited Canadian cattle production, feed mill and beef exporting facilities in Alberta and British Columbia earlier this summer. CCA says they do not anticipate any reason why the October 1 expansion of market access should not proceed.

Mexico closed to Canadian beef in May 2003 and reopened to beef from cattle under 30 months (UTM) of age later that year, but remained closed to beef from over-30-month (OTM) cattle and some UTM of-fal. Canadian officials had approved Mexico to export beef to Canada two years earlier.

CCA President Dan Darling had the opportunity to meet with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto in Ottawa in July when he announced that Mexico will



fully re-open to Canadian beef on October 1, 2016.

The most significant remaining bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)-related market restriction that the CCA and the Government of Canada are continuing to work on is expansion of access in China to full UTM from boneless UTM. The value of Canadian beef exports to China more than doubled in 2015 and there is further

potential once access is expanded.

The CCA believes there is significant potential for long term demand due to evolving consumer trends and a rapidly growing middle class in China.

Earlier in September, Canada Beef signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) worth roughly \$20 million with Chinese partners, Bright Haibo Invested Million (Fareast) Ltd. (Million Trading), a

subsidiary of Shanghai-based Bright Food Group which is the largest food and beverage company in East China. This MOU will further strengthen Million Trading's relationship with Canada Beef and support the overall growth in exports of Canadian beef into the Chinese market.

Canada Beef also signed a partnership agreement with a professional training centre for Western cuisine and Chinese cuisine

to young chefs, providing training to over 1,000 chefs per year across China.

The Canada Beef MOU was among 56 deals the Government of Canada announced it had signed with China worth more than \$1.2 billion.

With BSE trade issues becoming settled, the most significant continuing trade issues are the technical issues with Europe regarding anti-microbial rinses used in Canadian packing plants and implementation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership to restore a competitive balance in the Japanese market.

Once the Europe issues are resolved, CCA says they expect to see an increase in the number of Canadian cattle raised without beta-agonists like ractopamine which has the side benefit of also meaning an increase in beef available to be exported to China.

As Canadian beef producers make their individual production decisions, expanded access to all these markets are all excellent reasons to be confident in the future, according to CCA.

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# Local farmers pleased with harvest

Continued from front

Skulmoski says grain prices have remained high enough to allow for some profit, although canola prices are still low.

"I did some forward contracting on barley and I'm happy with what I'm receiving there," he says. "The canola has room to come back. I don't know what direction it's going to go. They are still at a value with our yields so we can still profit from it, but compared to what we've been used to the last few years they are slightly lower."

Cory Woywada, the manager at the Parrish and Heimbecker terminal west of Moosomin, says yields have been good this year, but disease has posed a problem for some cereal crops. Some crops have fared much better than others.

"Yield-wise it has been a good harvest but grade wise on some crops it has not," he says. "In wheat we are seeing high amounts of ergot and fusarium in it. For canola, the yields are good for guys who sprayed with fungicide, and for guys that didn't the yields are a little less. The quality of the crop is good on canola."

Woywada says moisture was the problem for cereal crops such as wheat and barley.

"Mostly it has to do with weather, it has been too wet," he says. "Some guys grew peas this year and the yields are down due to the excess moisture, but the soybeans guys are quite happy with the yield on that crop."

"The better crops were the earlier crops that went in. Anyone who planted their wheat really early didn't seem to get affected as bad. But now we're seeing the later crops here that have a lot more disease in them."

Woywada said harvest was nearly complete last week.

"I think they are probably 85 per cent 90 per cent



Canola being harvested between Moosomin and Rocanville.

was probably average, and canola we are not done yet so I'm not sure."

Crosson expected to be finished harvest by the end of last week.

"It's actually gone fairly well. It's not even the end of the September and we are already done. You don't always see that," he says.

Crosson said prices weren't great but that was to be expected this year.

"Wheat prices are definitely not very good. Most prices have softened up a bit but that's kind of expected because they are forecasting a big crop all over," he says.

Overall, though, he says he's pleased with harvest this year.

"It's probably as good as any. Yields they are average. Some things are maybe a hair better but other things are not quite as good as expected."

"It's not a 2013 again. It's probably more comparable to last year. We can't complain too much."

done. And then you get farther south, it's not quite as far done around Maryfield or Redvers."

Woywada says the soybean crops have been particularly good in the area this year.

"More guys are growing them now," he says. "They've come up with better varieties that are more suited for our area. They are good quality and they stand nice and they take the moisture a little better than some other crops."

Lee Crosson with Webster Seed Farm planted 4,000 acres around Welwyn. Crosson planted wheat, canola, oats, peas, fava beans, and soybeans this year.

Aside from some disease due to moisture, he says his harvest this year was about average.

"It's probably just a little above average or average," he says. "Canola had disease this year, it was just too moist and too much rain. The humidity was high every day. And then some of

the wheat, lots of it looks okay, but as far as disease, probably fusarium will be a problem but I'm not sure yet."

Crosson says yields were

what he expected.

"They are probably average I would think," he says. "Some of them like peas, they were below average with all the rains. Wheat



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## Wall on trade mission to South Korea, China

Premier Brad Wall left September 17 on a trade mission to South Korea and China aimed at showcasing and building on the province's considerable global strengths in food, fuel and fertilizer.

The 11 day mission will include speaking engagements and meetings with government and business leaders in Seoul, South Korea and Qingdao, Beijing and Shanghai in China. This will be the first visit by a Saskatchewan premier to South Korea and Premier Wall's third trip to China.

The mission coincides with a visit to South Korea and China of a Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership (STEP)-led delegation that includes 16 exporters and seven industry associations. The premier will also be joined at various meetings by representatives of the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers, the Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission, the Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission, Cereals Canada, the Universities of Saskatchewan and Regina, and Saskatchewan Polytechnic.

"Saskatchewan and Canada need to look to Asia if we want to keep growing our economies," Wall said. "South Korea and China are major markets for us and for the Saskatchewan companies that supply food and energy products and expertise to the world."

"China is our second-largest export market and the world's second-largest economy; we're looking to expand on existing relationships there and explore new trade opportunities. We also see a bright future for our agricultural producers in the South Korea market, thanks to the preferred access they will get under the new Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement."

Wall said he would be advocating for continued access to China's multi-billion dollar agri-food market on behalf of Saskatchewan producers. He noted he will also be promoting opportunities to increase Saskatchewan uranium exports to China.

Saskatchewan's overall exports to China have doubled in the last five years, reaching a value of \$3.36 billion in 2015. Our exports to South Korea in 2015 were valued at \$104 million, up from \$86 million in 2014.

Highlights of the mission include:

A keynote address in Seoul at a luncheon hosted by the STEP and the Korea Importers Association (KOIMA) plus meetings with major food and energy companies;

A keynote address in Qingdao at the STEP-organized Saskatchewan China Agricultural Trade Conference, plus a roundtable meeting with some of China's top buyers of Saskatchewan products;

A speech and panel discussion with business leaders and decision-makers in Beijing on Saskatchewan's world-renowned expertise in carbon capture and storage as part of the Canadian Embassy's "Canada in Conversation" speakers' series;

Eleven investment/economic development meetings with businesses and associations; and

Participation in an event Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions are holding in Beijing to celebrate the province's educational linkages with China.

Wall added Saskatchewan has what Asia wants and needs in agriculture, energy, innovation and education and we need to further our efforts on behalf of our exporters and agricultural producers, as well as our research centres and post-secondary institutions.

Since 2010, overall Saskatchewan international exports are up by 38 per cent and \$1.7 billion in specific investments in Saskatchewan.

"Since we began our export market diversification efforts in 2008, including trade missions, we have seen exports to China grow by 129 per cent and India by 155 per cent," Wall said. "Obviously trade missions are not the reason for these outcomes, but exporters tell me they are important to continuing our export success, especially in Asia."

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# Harvest almost complete in Southeast

A dry and windy week last week has allowed producers to make significant harvest progress. Sixty per cent of the 2016 crop has been combined and 28 per cent is swathed or ready to straight-cut, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture's Weekly Crop Report. The five year (2011-2015) average for this time of year is 62 per cent combined.

Regionally, harvest is furthest advanced in the southeast, where producers have 73 per cent of the crop in the bin. Sixty-six per cent of the crop is combined in the southwest, 53 per cent in the east-central region, 57 per cent in the west-central region, 54 per cent in the northeast and 48 per cent in the northwest.

Ninety-seven per cent of field peas, 85 per cent of lentils, 57 per cent of durum, 56 per cent of spring wheat, 47 per cent of canola and 15 per cent of flax have been combined. The majority of producers

had good harvest weather for most of the week. Rain showers toward the end of the week stalled some field operations for a day or two, particularly in the central and northern regions.

Most areas that reported rain received less than 12 mm for the week.

Provincially, cropland topsoil moisture is rated as nine per cent surplus, 86 per cent adequate and five per cent short. Areas around Porcupine Plain, Tisdale and Arborfield are getting some relief from excess moisture conditions; however, 36 per cent of cropland acres are reported to have surplus moisture at this time.

Strong winds blew some canola swaths around. Hail was reported in the Tantallon and Wynyard areas. Bleaching, sprouting, fusarium and earth tag are causing grade loss.

Producers are busy harvesting, hauling bales and controlling weeds.



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Above: Curt Paton drives a team of Belgian horses.

Above: Curt, Clint and Mel Paton

# The farm comes first for Paton family

BY CHRISTALEE FROESE

Work ethic is what it's all about for the Patons.

With 450 head of commercial charolais cattle, 200 purebred Belgian horses and 11,000 total acres of owned and rented land, there is no other way to operate.

"You get up every morning at 6 a.m. and you work until everything is done," said Mel Paton, the 81-year-old patriarch at MM Ranch and Paton Bros. farm near Carnduff.

Mel's grown sons Curt and Clint ascribe to the same philosophy. While they separate their work into two areas—Curt taking care of the livestock and Clint heading up the grain farming and accounting—they agree that maintaining a successful farm operation is all about time and commitment.

"Every day is different and every day is a challenge," said Clint of his non-stop work schedule.

"I never know what's going to come up each morning so I don't plan for anything. That keeps it interesting."

The division of labour finds Curt dealing with all horse-related duties, including

managing the PMU herd of 200 purebred Belgians. The herd has been in the family since 1966 with the Patons developing a breeding program that sees horses go to the USA as Amish work teams, as well as throughout Canada and the USA for the show ring, pulling teams and recreation. The prized Paton Belgians come with respectable price tags (\$2,000 to \$20,000) but Curt explains that the payoff requires a great deal of commitment.

"There were times last year when I was up for nine straight nights during foaling time," said Curt, adding that due to the exceptionally high heads and long legs of the Patons' Belgian foals, deliveries often require assistance.

With an expanded PMU quota and 90 new foals expected this spring, Curt will be extremely busy ensuring that the Belgians not only deliver their foals safely, but that all of the horses are broken and marketed and that vet care and breeding records are maintained.

Curt has four children, some of whom are involved in rodeo and some who have other off-farm activities, and a wife who

works as a Kindergarten teacher. Clint has six active children and is Carnduff's fire chief. The many off-farm commitments make for extremely busy schedules, however, Clint said when it comes right down to it, the farm comes first.

"Sometimes when there's choices to make like do you go to the hockey game or stay home, you have to stay home and work."

Curt agreed. "You have to be able to put the farm first for the good of everyone—that's the main thing," said Curt.

Many of the grown Paton children work on the farm when needed. However, Clinton and Curt have encouraged their kids to get training and establish careers outside of farming. They believe it's important to have some education or a trade because not all 10 grandchildren will be able to incorporate themselves into the existing farm operation.

Curt said that succession planning is currently under way to ensure that the economic health of the overall operation is maintained. Planning, along with open

communication, are the keys to success.

"You have to be willing to communicate and lay it on the line every once in a while just to know where everybody stands," said Curt, who maintains one of three individual farm yards within the three-family operation.

Patriarch Mel, who took over the farm from his dad and uncle in 1949, said the division of labour is one of the reasons the three-family farm has been a success.

"If you want to know about horses, you ask Curt; if you want to know about machinery or books, ask Clint; if you want to know what's for dinner, ask grandma," said Melvin, adding that if anyone wants to know about the cows, they ask him.

Paton matriarch Donalee keeps the home fires burning on the bustling farm, serving as grand central station at coffee and meal time.

"Having everyone around this much, you really get to know your grandchildren and you know they're doing well," said Donalee.

For more information on MM Ranch, visit [mmranch.ca](http://mmranch.ca).



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# Prof chosen to study effect of climate change on ag

A lot has changed over the years in farming. The equipment that producers use and the crops they plant are different. Even the weather has changed, and a recent study completed at the University of Regina looked into exactly what effect that is having on the agricultural industry.

David Sauchyn, a geography professor at the university and researcher with the Prairie Adaptation Research Collaborative, was chosen to be one of the project leads for the five-year international

climate change study. Sauchyn worked with researchers and students from Regina, the University of Saskatchewan, the University of Lethbridge, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Columbia.

Rural agricultural communities in countries where the researchers were from were chosen for the study. In Saskatchewan, an area around Swift Current was studied. Researchers then went out to the communities and talked to the farmers to see what was actually affecting them.

"We did systematic

social surveys, it wasn't just conversation. It was actually a questionnaire that was approved by the university and so these students spent anywhere

between a couple of hours and half a day on these farms," Sauchyn said.

These interviews revealed that winters are getting warmer, which is

extending the growing season for producers.

"The frost-free season is longer, and you can talk to anybody that's been on the land for a long time and

they'll tell you for sure that their seeding and things are germinating earlier in the year than they used to," Sauchyn said.

*Continued on page C20*

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# Thirst for craft beer brews opportunities

BY TAMARA LEIGH

Three flags fly proudly over Saanichton Farm—one for country, one for tractor and one for beer. For Bryce Rashleigh, they are visible reminders of what keeps the farm growing, and what they are growing for.

"The whole local food movement is huge on Vancouver Island," he says. "People are more supportive of my farm and what I do when they see the connection to what they eat and drink."

Rashleigh is one of four farmers on Vancouver Island growing barley on contract for Phillips Brewing and Malting. A leader in the craft brewing industry in British Columbia, the company built a malting plant in 2015, and is working with local farmers to increase barley acreage on the Island.

"It's a growing part of our business," says Rashleigh, who has more than doubled his barley acres since the malt plant was built. "It's exciting to be part of starting something new for Vancouver Island. Phillips has put \$1 million into building this malting plant, and it's up to us farmers to help them out."



## Brewery with its own malting plant

Matt Phillips is something of a legend in craft brewing circles, and is not averse to taking risks. In 2001, the young brewer financed his start-up with credit card debt and started brewing beer in a windowless apartment in Victoria. Fifteen years later, Phillips Brewing and Malting is one of the largest craft brewers in B.C., and the only brewery in Canada with its own malting plant.

"When you're brewing you are intimately aware of your raw ingredients," Phillips says. "I love the idea of bringing local barley into our system. It's a great way to give more of a signature to our beer, and we're able to take more control over that part of the supply chain."

## Sourcing local raw ingredients

Vancouver Island growers are currently producing 40 per cent of the 1,200 tonnes of barley that the brewery uses each year; the rest is sourced from the B.C. Peace River region. The company is actively pursuing new growers on the Island and promoting barley as a rotational crop to get more acreage into production.

"It's not like there's a shortage of malt barley in Canada, but there's a shortage of Vancouver Island barley," Rashleigh says. "With the local market right now, they basically can use anything producers can grow. It doesn't necessarily pay a lot more, but it feels good to be part of the food and beverage industry."

One of the barriers for farmers has been the availability of equipment. High land values and smaller fields require Island growers to get resourceful to make it work.

"Fortunately I've been able to make it work with some landowners who are supportive, and by bringing in good used equipment from the Prairies," Rashleigh says.

The simultaneous development of infrastructure for brewer and barley growers is creating a unique opportunity and market in the region.

## More barley needed for craft beer

"There's going to be an increasing demand for barley

again because craft beer uses so much more barley than big breweries," Phillips says. "We would love to be 100 per cent Island barley; hopefully it's just a matter of time before we get there."

The Canadian brewing industry sources 300,000 tonnes of malt barley from Western Canada each year. Up to 25 per cent of domestic malt barley will be used by craft brewers, despite the fact they only produce six per cent of the total volume of beer.

According to Beer Canada, the national trade association for brewers, there are more than 500 brewing facilities across the country, double the number 10 years ago.

"The growth in craft beer has been phenomenal since I started Phillips Brewing, especially over the last five years," Phillips explains. "Craft brew is now 12 per cent of market in the U.S. That statistic is similar in Canada, and more than 20 per cent in B.C."

## Hops needed too

The growth in craft brewing is not just fuelling demand for malt barley, but hops as well. Hops were originally added to beer as a stabilizer. Adding International Bittering Units (IBU), a measure of the iso-alpha acids, makes beer last longer.

Over the past 20 years, craft brewers have come to demand more from their hops. Far more than a stabilizer, they are using hops to add bitterness, body and aroma to the beer, fuelling an explosion in hop varieties: from fewer than 50 to over 200 in only two decades. Many of the varieties are proprietary and grown under license.

Joey Bedard is the founding partner in Hops Canada in Kamloops, B.C. The company started importing and selling hops in 2014, and has expanded through a partnership with the Kamloops Indian Band to become the biggest hop farm in Canada.

"The Kamloops Indian Band put up most of the capital and land, and we put up the business, contracts and distribution network," Bedard says. "We are now a year into the partnership and have 240 acres of hops in the ground."

At \$15,000 per acre in set-up costs, starting a hops farm of this size is a bold undertaking, particularly since it takes up to four years for plants to achieve full production and hop trends are fickle.

"Hop trends change all the time as you get better varieties to work with. We have to decide today what we think people are going to want four years out," Bedard says. "We sell on five-year contracts, and we only put in the ground what we've already sold."

## Small brewers sweet spot

Once the plants hit full production, they expect to produce 350,000 to 400,000 pounds of hops per year. Hops Canada currently sells to 170 breweries across Canada and the U.S., as well as India, South Africa, Chile, Columbia, Spain, Poland and Europe.

"We don't sell any hops to big-five brewers right now—90 per cent of clients are small breweries that brew under 150,000 litres per year. That's our sweet spot," says Bedard, adding that their customer base ranges from home brewers to super-wholesale.

While the growth in craft brewing has pushed up the demand and prices for hops, Bedard remains cautious about rapid growth in hops production.

"There's an illusion that there's a hops shortage right now," Bedard says. "In Canada, we have six to 10 new breweries opening per month. It takes two months to open a brewery, but four years to get hops to grow. Once the beer industry stabilizes, the hop world will catch up and tighten up quickly."

Hops Canada is focusing on opportunities in the international market for the next phase of expansion. They've signed an agreement with Thompson Rivers University to manage quality testing for export to the European Union, where demand is growing for North American-style hops.

"I feel like this industry has the potential to become much bigger than craft beer," Bedard says. "We're hoping to get another \$5 million in contracts and then we'll put in another field."

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# Hall: Study will benefit farmers

Continued from C18

There are positives to this, Sauchyn says, as it can lead to more productivity in the fields and pastures. However there are also drawbacks. With the warmer weather, new pests and weeds are making their way north from the U.S. Also the warm weather can equal more extreme weather events happening.

With the weather heating up, it does give opportunities to producers for new crops to be grown further north.

"There's opportunities there for increased production and also greater diversity of crops. But in order to achieve that increased productivity and increased diversity, the ag sector is going to have to deal with these pests and pathogens and also with these extreme events," Sauchyn

said.

Norm Hall, president of the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan, says that this study can help producers in the province.

"It's good to see analytical results from stuff we've been noticing on the farm for the last number of decades," Hall said.

Hall and Sauchyn are both hoping that the data from this study can help to impact government policies and programs for agriculture. Hall says that producers have encountered flooding in the last few years, but there haven't been government programs available to help.

"There has to be a mindset change in both farmers and government if we're going to see moisture over any length of time," Hall said.

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# Investments coming by companies that serve farmers

There are three underpinnings to the economy of southeast Saskatchewan and southwest Manitoba—agriculture, potash and energy.

All three have their ups and downs. The energy industry was on a tear for a good decade, and has slowed down considerably. We may see some more activity in that industry next year as oil prices hopefully rebound and work hopefully begins on Enbridge's Line 3 replacement.

The potash industry has had its ups and downs, and while the price of the commodity is down right now the area has benefited by massive investments by PotashCorp and Mosaic in their mines over the years.

While the agriculture industry has its ups and downs as prices for grains, oilseeds, and cattle go through their cycles, it is fundamentally more stable than the other industries.

Farmers have everything invested in their operations. It's their investment, it's their livelihood, it's their lifestyle. Unlike an oil company, a farm family is not going to pull up stakes in a slump.

Farming operations continue to operate in good times and not so good. That bedrock has proved a good foundation for companies that serve farmers to build upon.

Investments being made in the local area by companies that serve the farming community show their confidence in the future of the local agricultural industry.

• Sharpe's Soil Services is investing \$2.8 million in a new fertilizer blending facility that will allow for faster, more accurate blending of fertilizers. The company has grown greatly over the years and Chris Davidson says he sees potential for it to grow further.



Kevin Weedmark

• Parrish and Heimbecker is making a major investment at its terminal at Moosomin, with a 35,000 square foot dry fertilizer facility and a six-tank liquid fertilizer facility. Construction is under way on the major expansion. P&H expects the dry fertilizer facility to be in operation by March and expects to serve customers within 100 km of Moosomin.

• Mazer Equipment has purchased land for a larger dealership in Moosomin and is planning to build the new dealership next year.

• RPM Service is becoming a Versatile Equipment dealer. Moosomin is a major centre for farm equipment, with Maple Farm Equipment selling John Deere, Rocky Mountain Equipment selling Case IH and Mazer Equipment selling Ford New Holland. Versatile is a smaller player, but having one more dealer selling large farm equipment in Moosomin will give farmers one more option and help cement Moosomin's place as the go-to centre in the area for farm equipment.

All of these investments will benefit the local community, and will benefit farmers. They go to show once again that having a diversified local economy has served the area well.



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# Foxworthy in the field

On the first day of harvest this year, the weather was beautiful and the promise of a good harvest season was in the air—you could just feel it. The start of every harvest brings this incredible feeling of anticipation and excitement. It lasts about a day; two for some.

Harvest time in Saskatchewan is, without question, a crazy, busy time of year. And one thing is certain for those who are anywhere in the vicinity of our farm—if you can drive, you'll be called up for duty. I have this self-imposed rule when I drive someone else's vehicle, even a 'field truck'—don't touch someone else's radio settings. Adjust the seat, adjust the volume, adjust the air conditioning and that's it.

On my way out to combine one evening in late August, I ended up driving our son's old black half-ton out to the field. Now, it doesn't really make any difference what you take to the field as long as the brakes work and there's fuel in the tank. The bonus, in my mind, is having a working radio and I was pleasantly surprised to listen in to some Jeff Foxworthy on my short trip to the north 40.

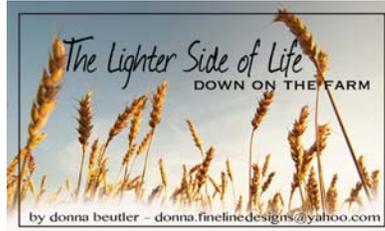
After a couple of hours on the combine, I began

to wonder if it would be worth my while to install a satellite radio in the combine so I could catch some comedy now and then, Jeff Foxworthy in particular, because one thing's for sure—listening to a little comedy sure passes the time of day as you make your way up and down the field.

As it was, by the time I finished combining that night, the old black half-ton was no longer in the field for me to take back to the yard so I hopped into another vehicle and headed home. As I drove, I was thinking how nice it would have been if all our vehicles had satellite radio so we could all catch some of Foxworthy's brand of humour now and then.

As luck would have it I ended up making several trips to the field in the old black half-ton throughout this year's harvest season. It was unfortunate in my mind that each trip was only four or five minutes long and I could only catch a little of Foxworthy's comedy on those short hauls.

On one of those trips, technically a 'meals-on-wheels' trip (and not in that motorhome-pie-in-the-sky dream I sometimes have), I offered to combine for an hour or so so our son could get the semi to the elevator



before it closed. Over a quick tailgate supper, my husband and I talked about how well the 'new-to-us' combine had run all harvest to that point (the 70% completion mark) and what great shape the header auger was in. As I powered up and lowered the header to the ground, I thought briefly about the bun dough I had left in the oven. Oh, heck, I thought, I would be home before it rose over the bowl and into the oven. I hadn't gone far before I plugged up, and then a second time with the now familiar 'chut, chut, chut' sound.

As I started up yet again, I wasn't thinking about bun dough anymore at all—I was just hoping I didn't plug up again. Alas, if only that had been my next problem. The noise I heard a few minutes later was definitely not the 'chut,

chut, chut' sound I was listening for, but it was substantial and I immediately brought everything to a halt.

And so, the stone (okay, the rock as the guys called it) I picked up did a little (or a lot depending on who you are)

damage to the header auger and yeah, I may never hear the end of it. If nothing else, it has marked the 2016 harvesting season and I can hear it being retold 10 years from now—"Remember harvest 2016? And that rock the size of China that mom picked up?" Yeah, well that's what the guys will remember. I, on the other hand, will probably remember arriving home, some four hours later, to deal with a pile of bun dough oozing over the edge of the bowl and down into the oven.

Harvest continued into September and I drove a variety of vehicles to the field but one thing I began to notice when I drove the old black truck was that

there seemed to be a lot of repetition of Foxworthy's act. Still enjoyable, mind you, just rather repetitive. Even that however didn't cause me to consider changing channels.

A week or two into September, and with several repeats of Jeff Foxworthy under my belt, I was giving my son a ride to the field in his old black half-ton, having never touched the radio, not even the volume. I happened to mention to him that I didn't realize he had satellite radio in this half-ton.

"I don't," he said as he jumped out of the truck, heading for the semi. Turning back, he elaborated: "Eject doesn't work anymore."

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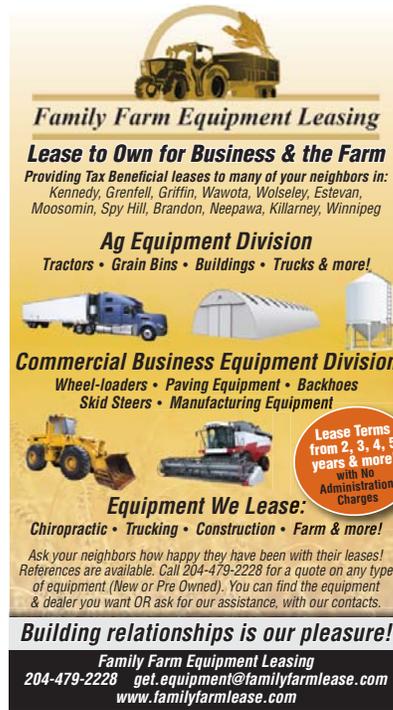
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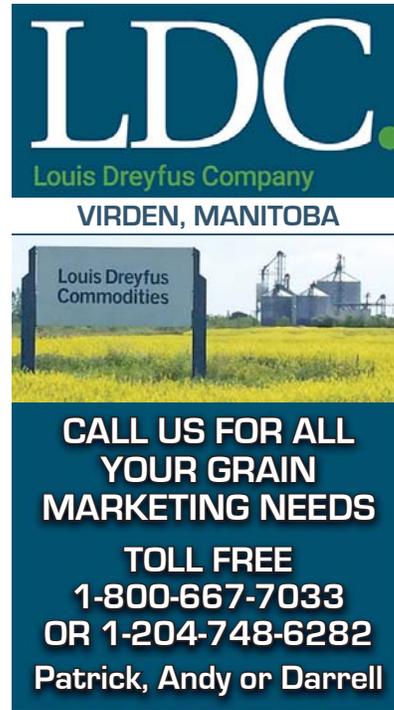
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Above left: Farm to Fork tour participants learn about crop research at the University of Saskatchewan. Above Right: 'Food influencer' guests experience a Saskatchewan harvest on the Farm to Fork tour.

# Farm to Fork Tour promotes Saskatchewan's bounty to influential food writers and chefs

The second annual Farm to Fork tour took place last week in the Saskatoon area as Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan brought more than 40 influential food experts from across North America together for a three-day journey through our province's thriving agriculture industry.

Farm and Food Care Saskatchewan (FFC SK) is a non-profit organization that works to connect consumers to agriculture. The purpose of the tour is to build relationships with key people who influence consumers and their food choices and bring them face-to-face with our farmers, ranchers and food producers.

The participants had the opportunity to witness harvest in full swing at Wilbar Farms near Dundurn, Sask., and to meet

their purebred Red and Back Angus cattle herd. Other tour stops included watching eggs reach their cartons at the Star Eggs processing facility, sampling a pint at Great Western Brewing Company and taking in the College of Agriculture and Bioresources Greenhouse at the University of Saskatchewan.

Seminars on food safety and biotechnology rounded out the program and participants were eager to ask questions of the agriculture industry representatives that joined them. Of course guests were never hungry as some of Saskatchewan's most talented chefs were featured at the Delta Bessborough hotel, Agar's Corner, Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Bofin's Public House and Riverside Country

Club.

"Our group left very well fed and richer in spirit. We experienced the passion and commitment these producers put into the food they feed their families and share with Canada and the world," said Patricia Chuey, a registered dietitian and enthusiastic tour participant.

"We are very passionate about agriculture here," said Clinton Monchuk, incoming Executive Director of FFC SK. "I want to thank everyone who came out to the farm tour and showed interest in learning about Saskatchewan's abundance of wholesome food products. The relationship doesn't stop here."

Sponsors of this year's tour included: Barley Council of Canada, Chicken Farm-

ers of Saskatchewan, CropLife Canada, the French's Food Company, Great Western Brewing Company, SaskCanola, Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association, Saskatchewan Egg Producers, SaskFlax, Sask Mustard, Sask Pork, Saskatchewan Pulse Growers and Tourism Saskatoon.

*Farm & Food Care Saskatchewan (FFC SK) is a whole-sector coalition made up of farm families, agribusinesses, food processors, restaurants, retailers, food companies and more. Together, they help tell the stories of the farmers who work hard to grow the fresh Saskatchewan food that we all enjoy. FFC SK works to provide a coordinated effort and a unified voice, connecting farm gates to our dinner plates.*

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# Fifth generation farmers in Kendal, SK

BY CHRISTALEE FROESE  
 Fourth generation farmers Jodi and Dennis Kress didn't have to work very hard to get the fifth generation involved.  
 As soon as their first child Owen could walk, he was interested in helping with chores on this 850-head mixed farm. By the time their second child, Zoe, and their third child, Cole, came along, the kids were part of the operation.  
 Now that the three Kress children are ten, eight and six, they have a full slate of after-school chores that takes them about an hour

to complete. Their jobs include collecting eggs, as well as feeding and watering chickens, cows and calves. They also bring a surrogate Holstein from the pasture to the barn daily to feed her calf and four additional calves.  
 "I like getting to be with all the animals because I like to hold them and pet them, especially the calves," said Grade 1 student Cole.  
 Jodi said her kids can't ever seem to get enough time helping out, even when it's an all-day job.  
 "Sometimes on a Saturday Owen will work eight

hours with his dad—what kid wants to work for eight hours? It's crazy!" said an amazed Jodi.  
 While Jodi did not grow up on the farm, she quickly came to appreciate the hours it takes to run a successful operation. Even when her and Dennis were living in cities and pursuing careers (lab and x-ray technician for Jodi and electrician for Dennis), they returned to the farm every spare moment to help out. In 2005, the pull of the farm became too strong and the ambitious couple decided on the spur of the moment that the time had come to return to the farm.  
 "It was the 31st of the month and we were going to pay our rent in Regina and Dennis said, 'why don't we just move home,'" recalls Jodi of the decision that the couple made when they were 25 years old.  
 Dennis and Jodi were welcomed into the fold by Dennis's farming parents, Jerome and Debbie Kress. As the oldest child of five, Dennis had been the one who always showed interest in becoming a full-time farmer.  
 The Kress farm dates back to 1912, with the original house being built by Wendelin and Katharina Kress in 1917. Their son



Above: Zoe, Owen and Cole Kress do chores on their Kendal, Sask. cattle farm

Martin and Betty then took over the mixed operation, raising 11 children on in the original site. A second house was built in 2002 by Martin's son Jerome and his wife Debbie, who took over from Martin and Betty in 1979. Jodi and Dennis moved into the 1917 farm

house in 2005. The young couple added onto the house in stages and continue to renovate as needed.  
 "I think it's really nice that Dennis can work with his kids and that he can live in this house that has been in this family for over 100 years," said Jodi, explaining that 160 Kress relatives gathered at the farm in 2012 for the celebration of its centennial.  
 Dennis's dad Jerome said he's proud that five generations have been able to continue on the farming tradition.  
 "It makes you feel like you did something for a reason and purpose," said Jerome who farms jointly

with Dennis.  
 The two-family operation consists of a herd of 360 cow-calf pairs in addition to 500 head of feedlot cattle. The family makes all of their own silage feed while getting deliveries of custom-made pellets up to three times weekly.  
 Dennis said the upside of running a family farm is the time he gets with his kids. The downside is the enormous time commitment it takes to keep a herd of 1,320 cattle fed, healthy and marketed.  
 "You have to miss some family things like going to dance and hockey, but you just have to be here," said the 36-year-old.

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# The realities of mergers

The idea of mergers has always been one that sends shudders through whatever sector the businesses are involved in.

That is with at least some good reason too. Mergers by nature reduce competition.

If two elevator companies merge, it means one less option for farmers to sell to.

That is the same regardless of what sector the merger is in.

Part of the reason mergers take place is to eliminate at least some of the competition. It is why big fish eat little fish.

Mergers also mean a shuffling of the deck in terms of services and local jobs.

When companies come together they move to consolidate, and that almost always means cutting out redundancies in service. To do less would be folly, since it is through such actions the efficiencies in providing products and services are realized which in turn is how a better overall bottom line is attained.

That said in the case of agriculture, and many

other sectors I am sure, the savings are not generally passed on to the consumer (farmer).

Mergers create better bottom lines for investors first and foremost.

So it's not a huge surprise when a report crossed the desk noting Terry Boehm, chair of the Seed and Trade Committee of the National Farmers Union, and past president of that group, said the suggested merger of Agrium and PotashCorp could have adverse impacts on Canadian farmers.

In an email from the NFU itself Boehm is quoted from an interview with CBC's Peter Armstrong, host of CBC News Network's On The Money, saying "Our experience with mergers, whether it be in herbicide manufacturers, seed companies, etc., has always led to higher costs to the farmer as we have very little power to negotiate as individual farmers, or even as small collectives ... with these behemoths that are being formed."

There is at least some rationale for the suggestion to be sure.



Calvin Daniels

But farm groups, even one as 'small farm-oriented' as the NFU, must be careful in criticisms of mergers.

Few sectors have seen the steady, decades-long, trend of ever larger farm operations.

The bigger fishes gobbling up the smaller ones began sometime in the period book-ended by the two great wars, and has been continuing unabated to this day.

The multi-thousand acre farms today are a far cry from the quarter section homesteads which brought farmers to the Canadian Prairies in the first place.

Farmers have merged, absorbed, bought out, and otherwise taken over their neighbours' farms for decades on end. They have done so in the name of creating efficiencies which are supposed to improve

their bottom lines. Producers, many of them at least, equate bigger with better in terms of what they can achieve in terms of making a return on investment and in the process a living for themselves.

It's a motivation not so far removed from the ideas behind a potash merger, only those owners are shareholders, and the scale of dollars is much larger.

Whether it's two potash companies becoming one, or one farmer absorbing another, the process is undertaken to generate efficiencies and better returns for the owners. That is really something central to the idea of business, and farming is no more, and no less, than just another business sector.



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# How to pay yourself

BY LORNE McCLINTON  
The two most common ways to pay yourself are wages and corporate dividends.

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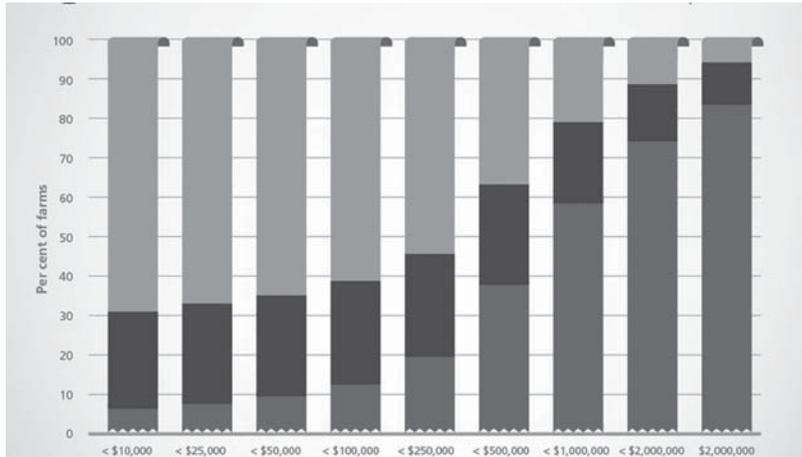
Dividends can be used to transfer money out of the corporation to any eligible shareholders.

Other ways include rental income and benefit options, like medical plans, that are tax deductible for the corporation but don't have to be declared as personal income.

Structuring farms as corporations offers lots of tax advantages. Since most farms qualify for the federal small business tax credit, the federal rate is only 11 per cent. The maximum provincial corporate tax rates vary from 11 per cent in British Columbia to 16 per cent in Nova Scotia and P.E.I. This is a fraction of most farmers' personal tax rates. It's no wonder many farmers try to keep as much of their economic activity as they can inside a corporation. However, sooner or later everyone has to withdraw money for personal use.

There are several ways you can do this, says Kelvin Shultz with Wheatland Accounting in Fillmore, Sask. The two most common are wages and corporate dividends. Both come with advantages and disadvantages.

"Taking money out of your corporation as wag-



es allows you to build up RSP (retirement savings plan) room at a rate of 18 per cent of your gross salary," Shultz says. "It also allows you to pay into Canada Pension Plan."

to calculate and submit your personal taxes, and accounting fees are paid personally.

Up until a year ago, producers who took money as dividends instead of

one over the other comes down to whether you want to pay into CPP and build RSP room through wages.

#### MANAGE YOUR DIVIDENDS

Dividends can be used to transfer money out of the corporation to any eligible shareholders, Shultz says. However, you have to remember that every shareholder who has the same class of share must be paid the same dividend per share.

"Most producers structure their corporations so that each spouse, child or

other shareholder is issued a different class of shares," Shultz says. "One will receive Class A shares, another will receive Class B shares and so on. Each share type might have exactly the same attributes, but having different share classes allows you to pay dividends to everyone at different rates."

Corporations do pay a higher tax rate on certain types of income, Shultz cautions. So if your corporation receives dividends or capital gains income, you will almost certainly want to take money out

of your company through dividends instead of wages.

These types of income go into something called a refundable dividend tax-on-hand account, better known by its acronym RDTOH. If you pay a dividend while you have an RDTOH balance, about 33 per cent of it will qualify as a tax credit to the corporation. So if the corporation paid a \$10,000 dividend, it would receive about a \$3,333 refund. If you are sitting on a sizeable balance in RDTOH accounts, it's likely advantageous to pay dividends rather than wages.

#### OPTIONS WITH BENEFITS

CRA does offer farmers a few other options, Shultz says. These include rental income and a variety of benefit options, like medical plans, that are tax deductible for the corporation but don't have to be declared as personal income.

"It's quite common for producers to charge their company rent for farmland they personally own outside the corporation," Shultz says. "Of course, this becomes income to you personally and does attract GST or HST. Rental income also can be used to build up your RSP room, but it doesn't qualify for CPP."

You can also claim a tax-free mileage allowance on your vehicle. If you keep track of the kilometres you are using for business, CRA will allow a per-kilometre claim on that vehicle the corporation can deduct and you don't need to include in personal income.

Any land or tax-paid asset rolled into the company at time of incorporation also qualifies as a shareholder loan. The company can pay this value back any time without it being classified as income.

Producers shouldn't take money out of the corporation by charging a management fee, Shultz cautions. CRA now frowns on this once-common practice. Its position is that management fees should be considered wages, and the corporation should have withheld and submitted the taxes and statutory deductions owed on it at the time of payment.

*Any land or tax-paid assets you roll into the company at time of incorporation qualify as a shareholder loan – which isn't classed as income when repaid.*

A less obvious but significant advantage is that the corporation calculates the tax you owe and submits it to Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) on your behalf.

This is an advantage, because if you take money out of the company in any other fashion, you have

wages paid about two per cent less tax, Shultz says. However, due to recent tax rate changes, that's no longer the case. While every province's rates are still a bit different, there's now so little variance it hardly matters which method you choose. The only reason you would choose



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# Is the next generation ready to take over the farm?

How can you tell if the next generation is ready to take over the farm? Abe Toews, a succession expert with Beyond Wealth Consulting in Regina, Sask., says the best way is to test them.

### Involve them now

"A good litmus test is to consider whether or not Mom and Dad can step away from the farm for three or four months without disrupting the operation," Toews says. "If the kids can't rise to the occasion, examine what needs to happen so they can."

He recommends starting to develop management skills by involving them in meetings with your lender and accountant, and letting them participate in production planning. It's critical they understand what the financial statements say. Next step is to test their leadership abilities by letting them take over a significant task that interests them.

If you want the secret to a smooth succession, it's up-front communication.

### Develop skills and start delegating

"There are lots of activities on the farm you can delegate that will be a lot better in younger hands," Toews says. "The younger generation is generally more adaptable to technology, for example. Farm Credit Canada has some good farm management software available for farmers, so make operating it a project for them."

It's important to let your children make some mistakes, Toews adds. They won't always get everything right, but you shouldn't necessarily jump in and try to fix it. As long as it's not a catastrophic error, give them the opportunity to figure things out.

### Learn to let go

Letting go of control of the farm isn't an easy decision for many farmers, says Diane McKenzie, a rancher and farm succession expert from Warner, Alta. Not only do they fear they won't have enough money for their retirement, but they're also hesitant to give up control of their life's work. That's why most planners have a tale to tell about a 65-year-old farmer who hopes that this year his dad will finally let him see the books.

"The emotional aspects of succession planning seem more complicated for some people than others," McKenzie says. "It's a grieving process; they're grieving the passage of time and their own mortality."

McKenzie says that if your parents aren't ready to let go, try to put yourself in their shoes. Develop a step-by-

step proposal that addresses both their emotional and financial concerns.

### Communication key to succession success

Talking about uncomfortable issues like money, retirement and death is never easy. That's why lack of communication between the two generations is the single biggest issue that Toews sees when helping a family with their succession plan.

"Mom and Dad grew up in an environment where talking about money wasn't considered appropriate," Toews says. "They never saw their parents' estate plan until the day after their funeral. If you want to distill the secret to a smooth succession plan down to one thing, it would be up-front communications."

Sometimes it's easier to discuss issues by bringing in an independent third party, a succession planner, to help steer the process and act as a buffer, McKenzie says.

### Outline expectations clearly

Toews suggests having everyone participate in regular family meetings. It's an opportunity for Mom and Dad to outline what their expectations are for retirement, and non-farming children can share what their expectations are for an inheritance.

"The sooner you start doing this, the better," Toews says. "Some of these planning things take time, so don't hesitate to start involving your children - even if some of them are still in their teens. At that stage you have no idea whether they'll be interested in taking over the operation or not. But showing them there is an opportunity for them if they are interested is critical for developing the entrepreneurial spirit they need to become a farmer."

### Will there be someone to take over?

Farming in Canada is on the cusp of a massive generational shift. Data from the most recent Census of Agriculture [SD1] won't be available for a while, but in 2011 the oldest operator on 55 per cent of Canadian farms was over 55.

Traditionally, the older generation has groomed the younger one to take over by working with them side by side. That doesn't appear to be happening as much today; the last census showed that only one in seven operators now work on a multi-generational farm (defined as a farm with at least two operators with an age difference of twenty years or more).

"The reality is that we have thousands of business owners who want to leave their business in the next five to 10

years," Toews says. He worries there may not be enough young entrepreneurs ready to take over. "It's a huge issue and it hasn't had the attention it deserves." It's also an opportunity for young people passionate about farming.



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# FCC report reflects continued financial stability in agriculture

Canadian farmers are in a strong position to meet their financial obligations, despite plateauing farm incomes and slowing land appreciations, according to Farm Credit Canada's 2016-2017 Outlook for Farm Assets and Debt Report.

"This financial strength allows the industry to invest even more in the innovation and productivity it will need to feed an ever-growing world population," said J.P. Gervais, FCC's chief agricultural economist.

In 2015, the debt-to-asset ratio on Canadian farms remained historically low at 15.5 per cent, compared to the previous five-year average of 15.9 per cent and the 15-year average of 16.7 per cent, according to the report.

A low debt-to-asset ratio is generally considered better for business, since it provides financial flexibility and lowers risk for producers.

FCC's Outlook for Farm Assets and Debt Report provides an overview of the balance sheet of agriculture, focusing on the financial health of the sector. It also looks at the affordability of assets relative to farm income, with a special focus on farmland values.

"After a prolonged period of strong growth in

farm asset and land values, our projections indicate a deceleration in both increasing land values and farm debt levels," Gervais said.

The report analyzed three key indicators of the financial health of Canada's agriculture sector: liquidity, solvency and profitability. It found that farm liquidity, which looks at the ability of producers to make short-term payments, and solvency—the proportion of total assets

financed by debt—have remained consistently strong over the past five years.

In 2015, farm profitability, calculated by comparing net income to total assets, was slightly below the five-year average due to strong farm asset appreciation, especially in farmland values.

"Land is the most valuable asset a farmer owns and the most important input for agricultural production," said Gervais,

noting that land made up 67 per cent of the value of total farm assets in 2015, compared to 54 per cent in 1981.

"As farming becomes more profitable, farmland becomes more expensive," he said. "However, when asset values are increasing more quickly than net farm income, overall prof-

itability begins to soften. This reflects the cyclical nature of the business."

From 2001 to 2011, the value of farmland and buildings appreciated on average 7.2 per cent per year, doubling over that timeframe. From 2012 to 2015, average annual appreciation was 11.7 per cent and total appreciation

was 39.4 per cent.

Gervais said a combination of low interest rates and strong crop receipts was the primary cause of the rapid rate of asset appreciation in recent years. He projects appreciation will slow down with the expectation of lower crop prices over the next two to three years.

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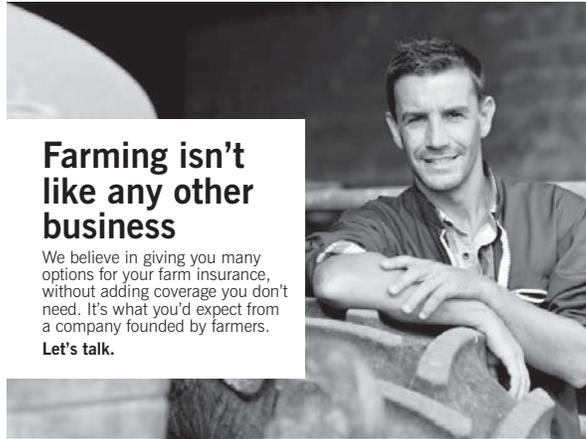


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- 10 p.m. Slack

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# Good times increase need for farm financing



**BY KEVIN HURSH**  
 At first blush this seems counterintuitive, and I'd never really thought about it until I saw a presentation on the topic by Gord Nystuen of Input Capital Corp at the Canadian Global Grains Symposium in Winnipeg.

tough financial conditions, but because returns have been good for many producers.

to their successors without keeping some equity for themselves. After all, they need money for their retirement and it's money they've earned.

Dad and Mom may want to be paid in full for their equity by the next generation or they may settle for half to make the transfer more tenable. Perhaps because they have off-farm investments they can afford to be compensated for only 25 per cent of the farm's value.

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**FARMS INCREASINGLY WORTH MORE**

Farmland values have increased dramatically in most regions of the country, pushing up the net worth of farms. And in the supply managed industries, quota values have not declined. With strong balance sheets on most farms and 75 per cent net equity being the norm, why would equity be a looming concern?

For farms being sold to third parties, purchase prices are typically the highest ever. For farms that operate with a significant portion of rented ground, paying rental rates also consumes capital.

**MOM AND DAD NEED EQUITY TO RETIRE**

In many cases, farms are passed from one generation to the next, but the retiring generation is unlikely to pass the entire farm

**OUTSIDE FINANCING A NECESSITY**

Each farm and family situation is different, but a modest farm can easily have millions of dollars in equity. Even though the farm has been profitable and even though the transfer is intergenerational, there will be a big need for outside capital.

Profit contributes to land and quota values, and it's a much healthier situation than meagre or non-existent profitability causing stagnant or falling asset values. However, profitability doesn't reduce the need for financing. Instead, the need increases, even for many of the cases where the farm remains in the family.

Good times in agriculture do not decrease the need for outside capital and various financing options. In fact, the opposite is true.

**DIVERSITY OF CAPITAL OPTIONS NEEDED**

Input Capital, which bills itself as the world's first agricultural commodity streaming company, buys canola from Prairie farmers using multi-year contracts with the majority of the cash paid up front. In essence, they provide a form of financing for producers who may be short of equity for debt financing.

Farmland values have increased dramatically in most regions of the country, pushing up the net worth of farms.

Nystuen believes a great deal of financing in various forms will increasingly be needed, not because of



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The Agriculture More Than Ever campaign is geared toward promoting positive perceptions of agriculture.

## Manitoba supports Agriculture More than Ever campaign

Manitoba has renewed its partnership with Agriculture More Than Ever, a national initiative to encourage those involved in agriculture to speak positively about their work and their industry, Agriculture Minister Ralph Eichler announced last week.

"Thousands of Manitobans work in the agriculture sector and they all have positive stories to share," said Eichler. "By renewing our partnership with Agriculture More Than Ever, we want Manitobans to know we share their passion and commitment to the agriculture industry. We believe there is a lot of good news to share and want to be part of that story." Agriculture More Than Ever encourages

governments, organizations and individuals to sign up as "advocates" and commit to being a positive voice for the industry. Since its launch more than four years ago, over 470 partner organizations and 2,500 individuals signed on.

"Being an advocate is about adding your voice to the food conversation in positive, engaging, and relatable ways," says Candace Hill, manager of Agriculture More Than Ever.

"Our newest campaign is a video that shows the real faces of people in agriculture with a strong call to action for everyone in the industry to get involved in the food conversation, no matter how big or small their contribution."

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Watch for signs Sale Day.

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**TRUCK & TRAILERS:**  
• 2008 Ford F350 Super Duty Truck w/12' Flat Deck, 6.8L V10 Gas Eng, Auto Trans, XL Package, 4x4, Air, Tilt, Cruise, 17" Rubber, SAFETIED (recently rebuilt engine)  
• 32' Wilkinson Gooseneck Flat Deck Trailer w/ (2) 10000 lb Dual Wheel Axles, Beaver Tails w/ Ramps, Strap Winches, Dual Jacks, SAFETIED  
• 28' Golden Falcon 5th Wheel 7/A Travel Trailer w/Bunk Beds in back, couch and table converts into a bed, bed in the front, sleeps 6, fridge, stove, (New) Microwave, (New) Hot Water Tank, Bathroom w/ tub & shower, air cond  
• (5) Yard Trailers, 20' x 12' W, 16" Tires (Paint Trailers)



**INDUSTRIAL:**  
• Trailer Built for Handling Sheet Metal Material Vertically  
• Sullair SD-80 DSL Fork Lift, Maximum Lift - 169", Cap - 8000 lb, 3 Speed Trans, 4 Cyl DSL Eng, 6006Hrs Showing, s/n#4394007832, (Was Safetied till Oct 9, 2015)  
• Caterpillar Model GCI 5K Propane Fork Lift, Certified Oct 9, 2015, 3 Stage Mast, Lift Cap 3000lb  
• Hyster Electric Fork Lift w/Goold Charger, 24 Cells, 48V, Batteries only 5 years old, Certified Oct 9, 2015, Hyl Fork Side Shift 22" 4"3", 9530Hrs Showing  
• Hyster Outdoor Fork Lift, 6 Cyl Ford Gas Eng (Rebuilt 6

years ago) Needs carb rebuilt, 2820Hrs Showing, • Scissor Lift (Indoor), Electric Drive w/Built-in Charger, 40' height • (4) Propane Cylinders for Fork Lifts • 4 Point Portable Yard Crane w/2000lbs hoist • 24' I Beam Yard Drag

**TRACTOR:**  
• IH 1086 Tractor w/Dual Hyd, Dual PTO, 8 Speed Trans w/1/A, 18.4-38 Rear Singles, New starter Spring 2016, 7717Hrs Showing, s/n - 56

**WELDERS & PLASMA CUTTERS:**  
• Miller Delta Fab Mig Welder w/Miller Wire Feeder, 3PH, 400 AMP, was Certified till Oct 4, 2015  
• Miller Delta Fab Mig Welder w/Miller wire feed, was Certified till Oct 4, 2015, 3PH, 400 AMP  
• Miller Delta Fab Mig Welder w/Miller Wire Feeder, 3PH, 400 AMP, was Certified till Oct 4, 2015  
• Acklands (Miller) Mig Welder w/AMS-22A 24V Wire Feeder, 3PH, was Certified till Oct 4, 2015  
• Thermal Arc Fabstar 4030 Mig Welder w/Thermal Arc VA4000 Ultra Feed, 400 AMP, 30V, 3PH, 50 AMP, 16V, 1PH, was Certified till Oct 04, 2015  
• Memco Mig Welder w/ Memco 24V Constant Speed Wire Feeder, 3PH (can be converted to 1PH), AC/DC 300 CC/CV, was Certified till Oct 4, 2015

• Miller Millermatic 352 Mig Welder, 2014, 220V, 1PH, Lincoln Ideal Arc 250 Arc Welder, AC/DC, 220V, 250 AMP  
• Miller Regency 250 CV-DC Arc Welding Power Supply, 220 V  
• Thermal Arc Power Supply for Mig Welder  
• Hypertherm Powermax 1000 G3 Series Plasma Cutter w/ Cart, 220V, 1PH • Lincoln Electric Plasma, 220V, 1PH

**IRON WORKING EQUIPMENT:**  
• Pearson 12' Break, 8000 lbs/psi 5x Inch, Electric Adjuster for Pressure, Foot Pedal Release, 2 Set of Dies, 600V, 3PH • Darbert 10' Shear, will cut up to 1/4" material, 3 sets of blades, 575V, 3PH, 15 AMP, 10 HP, Adjustable Backstop, s/n#8907322 • Kingsland Iron Worker, 3PH, Notching: 1/2-6x3x3/8, Rect - 2x3x3/8, Angle Chopping - 90 Degree - 5x5x1/2, 45 Degree - 3.5x3.5x3/8, Section Cropping - Tee: 4x4x1/2, Channel - 6x3, Just - 6x3, Angle - 6x3.5 x 3/4 Will Punch 1 1/8" Hole, Set of Punches & Dies from 1/4" - 1 1/8", extra set of Blades (3 Blades, one in unit), Roller Table on Feed Side, Notcher disconnected - does not have a guard • Hommade HD Hyd Press w/Power Pnc, 6000 Pcs, 220V, 4" Diameter Ram, 24" Stroke, 60" W Opening  
• Cosen Machinery Industrial SH-380ER Band Saw 2HP-220V, 2003.5, Totally Hydraulic, Hyd Vice, Hyd Lift,



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# Decision-making 101 for farmers

Everyone has their own way of making decisions. Some people are disciplined, systematic analysts. Others listen to their gut. Many, if not most, combine both approaches to one degree or another.

Are there decision-making best practices that farmers can adapt to their own situations? Here are the views of a farmer, a consultant who advises farmers, and a business professor who also happens to be a farmer.

## The farmer

When you consider the scale of Jeff Carlson's farming and business operations, it seems clear that many sound decisions have been made over the years.

Carlson and his family crop 19,000 acres in the Trochu area of central Alberta as well as in Saskatchewan. The operation includes an extensive cattle operation, spanning cow-calf, backgrounding and feedlot. The family also operates a group of three fertilizer and chemical dealerships.

I think a farmer is more likely to regret the land purchase they could have made but didn't.

To this solid farming and land-owning heritage, Carlson brings a systematic approach to making decisions. It works for his day-to-day agronomic choices, but the same process largely applies when he looks years if not decades down the road.

**Set a timeline.** If a decision needs to be made, such as on a land purchase, Carlson believes it's important to establish a deadline. "Otherwise, you can get caught up in a kind of analysis paralysis," he says, "where you just keep looking at the same data over and over again but nothing happens."

**Ask for input.** Carlson seeks advice from his lawyer and accountant, as well as friends and current and former business partners. "Your accountant and lawyer are trained to be cautious," says Carlson, a lawyer himself. "That is valuable, but if you were too cautious, you would never end up doing anything."

**Do research into the business environment.** Carlson reads extensively among agriculture and business-related media. He also attends industry conferences and trade shows and is open to ideas from consultants he works with. This input reflects the climate in which Carlson's decision will be made.

**Consider the dimensions of the decision.** With 19,000 acres under his belt, Carlson is no stranger to land purchase. As an example of his decision-making method, he observes that a prospective land purchase would have at least three aspects that need to be considered carefully and in detail. One is financial, and whether the cost of the land would fit with his financial plan. The second is about productive farming, whether the land is worth farming. Finally, there's a personal dimension where he considers how the land will fit within his family's long-term future.

**Seek agreement within the family.** Carlson believes that one of his family's key strengths is the way they come together around a big-ticket decision-making. "Sometimes we can disagree," he says, "but generally we are able to take a formalized business approach, and try to check the emotion at the door."

**Respect your gut.** Carlson's decision-making process is systematic, but that doesn't mean it's approached with a cold, robotic mentality. Subjective factors are also considered. If your intuition clashes with the data, that doesn't mean your intuition is wrong. "There have been lots of times I have stepped out and

made a decision even though not all the information I needed was available," Carlson says. "There are definitely times where the family or the partners need to just hold hands and jump, as long as you're all doing it together."

## The consultant

The phone rings. It's your neighbour down the road, calling with some news you've been looking forward to hearing. They've decided to sell some land, right next to yours.

Do you buy the land? According to Rob Saik, Red Deer, Alta.-based founder of agronomic consulting firm Agri-Trend, this decision could be a milestone in the farmer's career and no two producers will tackle it in exactly the same way. He's often seen the process first-hand.

"Agri-Trend puts together peer groups of farmers," Saik says. "Most fall into one of two positions: those interested in expanding their land base

and those interested in getting more from the land they have now."

As Saik has advised these growers and observed their thought processes, he's come up with a two-point method to inform a land purchase decision.

First, identify where agriculture is in its economic cycle. Second, identify where you are in your agronomic cycle. Saik believes the economic cycle is in a less robust phase than a few years ago.

"When farmers are in rapid expansion mode and crops are making money, it's hard not to think about buying land," he says. "It's tougher now. I see more guys interested in mitigating risk and getting more agronomically from the land they have. It's important to know whether you're in an expansion stage in your cycle, or an agronomic stage, because you probably can't do both at the same time."

To Saik, however, because of the unique nature of farmland as an investment, a productive asset and an emotional touchstone, there is one decision that a farmer can often regret.

"In the long run," he says, "I think a farmer is more likely to regret the land purchase they could have made but didn't; the land that got away from them. That can stay with you for a while."

## The professor

Do you find the s-word intimidating? Take heart. According to University of Toronto business professor Glen Whyte, strategy is just a high-minded word for something simple.

"A strategic decision really means a big decision that has long-term consequences and is difficult to change once you make it," says Whyte, whose family farms near Peterborough, Ont.

If you were an MBA student in Whyte's class, you'd spend

months and years sweating over strategic decision-making. For his fellow Canadian farmers, he breaks it down to five essential questions you can ask yourself, reflecting what he calls integrated problem-solving.

What goals are you trying to achieve? Assess how the decision fits into your overall business plan and whether there are other options that could also help you reach your goals.

Is your analysis sound? "It can be human nature to make a decision, then go back and find a rationale to justify it," says Whyte. "Make sure the reasoning takes place first."

How does the decision affect the level of business risk? "There may be ways to mitigate those risks," he says. "But you might want to accept a higher level of risk, not less, as long as you are compensated for that risk with sufficient upside."

If it fails, why did it fail? Whyte recommends that, before pulling the decision-making trigger, you perform a "pre-mortem." "This is an act of imagination or a thought experiment," he says. "Imagine that it's a year later, and the decision turned out to be a disaster. Try to come up with reasons why the decision could have turned out poorly." This exercise ensures you identify the risks in the decision before you make it, and could unearth risks you hadn't fully considered.

If it fails, what's next? "Our typical response to failure isn't to take another course of action," Whyte says.

"More often, it's to double-down and make an escalating commitment to a failing strategy." Having a Plan B in place, and a defined time for when that Plan B kicks in, will help manage the impact of a decision going sideways.

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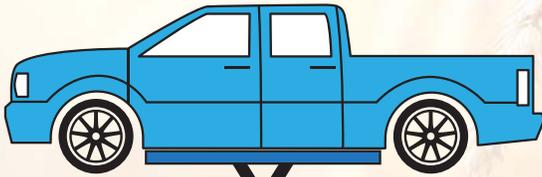
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